

6/10/04 This is the third draft of the chapter on Players in Hold'em Brain by King Yao. Please email feedback, suggestions, comments, opinions, questions to [KingYao@HoldemBrain.com](mailto:KingYao@HoldemBrain.com) or you could use the Feedback Form to email me at the bottom of the page.

## **Hold'em Brain: Players**

### **Copyright 2004 by King Yao**

Knowing how the other players play is one of the keys to achieving success at Limit Hold'em. When sharp players know their opponents well, sharp players will know how their opponents act and think. Sharp players will be able to take advantage of their opponents' weaknesses and avoid their strengths. In order to understand how players play, sharp players will observe their opponents carefully. They will pay attention to their opponents' play, how often their opponents bet, call or raise in different situations. Pegging opponents with stereotypes is useful as a first pass, however, most players will show a combination of different type of stereotypes and their own particular quirks. So it is more useful to observe each player individually. It is rare to find a poker player in real life who fits into any one of these character molds perfectly. What I will show here is a spectrum of the types of characters at the poker table. The style of players will usually fall close to one of these stereotypes or mixes of two stereotypes. It is a matter of identifying what type of characteristics and personalities they have. Also keep in mind that it is possible for a player to play like one character but slowly morph into another character as the player plays longer. It may be that the player's personality has changed due to his mood, either because he is winning and having a good time, or he is losing and feeling frustrated. Or it could also be that you simply pegged the player incorrectly. Maybe his personality is closer to a different stereotype, and his play was more just a reflection of getting very good cards or very bad cards for a short period of time. After all, even the tightest, most conservative players would be raising every hand if they kept getting high pocket pairs. It could also be that the player tries to play solidly when he is first seated at the table, but reverts to his typical style after awhile.

If you are a sociable player, it may be advantageous to engage in conversations with the players next to you so you can expedite your learning process of their personality and characteristics. Often appearance alone may get you part of the way, but appearances can be deceiving at times. Drawing a player into discussion about his life, his work and a bit about the hands he has played may help you get to know him a lot quicker and speed up your own education.

Understanding how your opponents play is more useful when pots quickly become heads-up as opposed to being multi-way pots. This means it is more useful in shorthanded games and less useful in low limit games. In shorthanded games, pots will become heads-up on the Flop more often than in full games because there are fewer players who have to fold to make it heads-up. In low limit games, players will play looser in general, so more players will be seeing the Flop and beyond. When the opponents play looser, the tighter players can correctly expand their playable hands with good drawing type of hands. So the looseness in low limit games compounds upon itself. With many players, it becomes tougher to use any one player's tendencies to your advantage, since there are other players in the hand to consider as well. With that said, any player who knows how his opponents play will always be better off than a player who does not.

I will break down player stereotypes into two major categories, predictable players and

unpredictable players. Both categories have their share of bad players and good players. Players can be predictable whether they play loose or tight, but generally predictable players are passive.

Players can be unpredictable whether they play loose or tight, although generally the unpredictable players are more on the aggressive side. Sometimes certain players may become extremely predictable in certain situations when they are not normally.

## **PREDICTABLE PLAYERS**

Predictable players are easier to play against than unpredictable players. When predictable players act, the strength of their hand will typically be clear based on their actions. It may be that when they bet or raise, they have a strong hand. It may be that when they have a strong hand, they never raise on the Flop but always wait to raise on the Turn when the bet size doubles. Conversely, it may be that when they raise on the Flop they never have a made hand but are raising for a free card.

A good, sharp player has a better idea of the strength of predictable players' hands based on their actions, although a poor player may not pick up on it. Different players will be predictable in different ways. Here are some of these stereotypes.

### **The average player**

The average player does not do anything too extreme, he likes to play, but he is not overly aggressive with his hand nor does he play too passively. He will bet when he has a good hand, he will raise when he has a great hand, he will call when he has a passable hand, and he will fold when he has a poor hand. The average player will give himself excuses to stay in the hand rather than fold. The average player in any particular limit is different from the average player in another limit.

For example, the average player of the \$20-\$40 games is a different player than the average player of \$5-\$10 games. In general, the average player of the \$20-\$40 game is a better player, he plays tighter, is more aggressive when he should be and has a few tricks up his sleeve. Although the average player of the \$20-\$40 games will still play too many hands, he will play fewer hands than the average player of the \$5-\$10 games. The average player in \$5-\$10 games does not do anything overtly stupid like call two raises with 96o, but he plays even more hands than the average player in \$20-\$40 games. The average player will put in a bluff now and then but not all that often. When he raises, you can usually count on him having a premium hand.

### **The calling station**

The calling station likes to play along, and follow with everyone else. He does not want to disturb the game and perturb any of his fellow comrades by unnecessarily raising. When the calling station bets, you know he thinks he has a good hand. When the calling station raises, you better run for your life, because he has a monster. The calling station will play many hands, has no problem limping in while in early position, calling a professional player's early position raise, or calling a bet when he has a pair of 8's when there are three overcards on the board. Beware, the calling station could be unintentionally trying to rope-a-dope you. If you play too aggressively into him without a made hand, he will simply call you down with a middle pair or a bottom pair. You do not want to bluff the calling station because he thinks it is a social game like the one in his hometown where everyone plays just about every hand to the River. He is our friend and as our friend, he will not get scared by your actions, he thinks you are his friend as well. A calling station is always a bad player.

### **The rock**

A rock is not a sharp player, but his strategy will make him a small winner in most limits. As

strange as it may sound, the rock and the calling station have some similarities. Like the calling station, the rock will only bet with good hands and only raise with strong hands. As with the calling station, you must be careful when the rock bets or raises and give them respect when they show aggression. That is where the similarities end. The calling station plays a lot of hands, while the rock plays very few hands. The rock may sit there for hours folding his starting hands and will have no problems folding his blinds, thus making him a prime candidate to steal the blinds from. When he does play a hand, watch out, he's got something good. The rock usually thinks he is a better player than the average player. He values patience above all else, and since he is the most patient at the table, he usually thinks he is the best. In some games, he may be right. A rock is typically a good player, although he will not extract as much edge out of the game as better players will. Rocks can be long term winners in low limit games and some middle limit games, but they will need to expand their game and creativity in order to win in the higher limit games.

### **The solid player**

The solid player is a player who has an idea of correct play. He knows he needs to be patient to win at this game, but he is not overly tight. He will play more hands than a rock and he will usually be aggressive when he does play. If he raises from early position, he is predictable because he will have a quality hand. If he open-raises from late position, his hand will be harder to predict because he understands he can loosen up in that position and he is not afraid to steal the blinds. You normally want to avoid the solid player when he is raising. He may not bluff or semi-bluff enough because he does not usually take too many chances. Some players will play like a solid player only to morph into a different type of player after a while at the table. The solid player is a good player.

## **UNPREDICTABLE PLAYERS**

Unpredictable players are not necessarily good or bad players. When they act, it is tougher to pinpoint their hand compared with pinpointing a predictable player's hand. Unpredictable players will use strategies such as bluffing and semi-bluffing often, sometimes too often. Even though good players can be somewhat unpredictable, there is only so far they can take this. If they are too unpredictable, it will mean they are playing too many hands, and giving up too much edge for the quest to be unpredictable. Instead, good players will choose spots to be unpredictable, spots where playing unpredictably may give them the greatest edge. Players who play unpredictably all the time invariably play too many hands and are giving up too much edge for their trickiness.

### **The loose aggressive player**

The loose aggressive player likes to play a lot of hands. Unlike the calling station, he likes to play them aggressively. He will raise and bet when his cards are warranted, but he may sometimes bet and raise when it is not clear that he has the best hand at the moment. The loose aggressive player likes to bet on the come. He will use the free card raise as often as he can, even if he just has overcards. Once he raises for the free card, he oftentimes feels compelled to keep betting due to the perceived weakness of his opponents if they are just calling him. It may feel necessary to rope-a-dope (to play passively so the aggressive player will keep betting) the aggressive player by calling him instead of scaring him off with a raise or a re-raise. The loose aggressive player is always trying to steal the blinds, even from middle position. He will bluff more often than the average player and he loves fancy concepts such as semi-bluffing, raising for free cards and check-raising. But he will overuse these concepts. Because he plays so many hands and is aggressive with them, it may be harder to predict his holdings. He may sometimes run over his

opponents when he has the better hand, since other players are more willing to call his bets and raises. Loose aggressive players are usually not good players, however they can get in some streaks where it may seem like they are the best player around.

### **The maniac**

The maniac is Mr. Hyde to the loose aggressive player's Dr. Jekyll. The maniac is completely out of control and raises sometimes even without looking at his hole cards. Everyone is licking their chops to get a piece of this guy. Maniacs will raise and bluff way too often and they will usually lose their money quickly. Maniacs may not play like maniacs all the time. Sometimes players who are just having a bad day turn into maniacs when they are on full tilt. This can happen after they have been dealt a couple of bad beats which could lead them to play very aggressively in order to get back to even. The maniac is a horrible player and is great for the game.

### **The professional players**

Professional players are sharp and are constantly thinking about the game and their opponents. They are the best players and the ones that you least like to see at your table. They could be playing poker as their main source of income or they could be playing it as a supplemental income. They are playing poker to win unlike other players who may be playing for the gamble, the entertainment or just the competition. Professional players understand the importance of playing aggressively when they have a solid hand and they also understand the importance of choosing their hands selectively. They will try to extract the most amount of edge from their opponents when they have the best of it, but try to get away cheaply when they have the worst of it. Professional players have thought about and studied the game, be it through reading, talking to other players or just thinking about the play of hands on their own. Professional players will still have a wide range of characteristics in their style. Some will be more aggressive than others, some will bluff a bit more than others. Of course, there are always those who consider themselves as professional players who really are not.

### **Players can change styles depending on if they are winning or losing**

There are players who will try to play solidly when they first sit down, and continue to play solidly if they start off winning. But some players can change their styles drastically if they start to lose, particularly if they take a bad beat. All of a sudden, these players will go from playing solid to being a bit more aggressive. Then they will semi-bluff and bluff more. If they continue to lose and get some of their bluffs called, or worse, they get more bad beats, then they could wind up opening up their game and could turn into a maniac-type of player.

This is a situation where having played against the player in the past and knowing this particular characteristic is very useful. If it is the first time you ever played with him and he plays like this, you may assume this is how he plays and use that information the second time you play at the same table with him. But the second time around, he may be running good and playing solidly, in which case, your perception of him will be completely off.

### **Getting a sense of opponent's pattern of play**

In order to identify how players play, you should get a sense of their pattern of play. Players tend to be consistent with their styles, so if you observe their play, you will have a better idea of what you are up against in future hands. Here are a few things to watch for and what they may mean.

1. Do they like to be the bettor or raiser or do they like to be the caller?

Players who like to bet or raise are aggressive in general. This may mean they are a bit unpredictable as they can bet or raise with a wider variety of hands. Players who like to call or check are more predictable because when they bet or raise, you can be more assured they have a strong hand.

2. Do they play straightforward or are they tricky?

Players who are predictable tend to play in a straightforward manner. When they bet, it means they have a quality hand, when they check it means they have a mediocre or poor hand. Tricky players like to check-raise, slowplay, semi-bluff, bluff and raise for free cards. Many of these plays constitutes playing in a disguised manner in one round but showing the true strength of the hand in another.

3. Do they like to raise with a draw or will they only raise with a made hand?

Players who like to raise with draws are more unpredictable. They could be raising with made hands as well, so when they do raise, it is less clear what type of hand they have. Players who only raise with made hands are more predictable. If you do not have a better made hand yourself, you know you have to catch to beat them.

4. Do they have a good understanding of the game of Hold'em?

In all of these cases, it is important to know if your opponents have a decent understanding of the game. If they do not, then they may be acting based on their misconceptions. For example, a player who has a straight when there is a possible flush on board may disregard the possibility of his opponents holding a flush and may think of the strength of his own hand in isolation. These players are unpredictable only because they have a poor understanding of the game, thus their actions are tougher for an experienced player to rationalize.

### **Sharp players may play differently against other players than they will against you**

It is possible that sharp players will play differently against other players than they would against you. If you are a decent player yourself, the sharp players will likely know this and play against you accordingly. They may bet for value against weak calling stations, but would not when you are their opponent. They may call down aggressive semi-bluffers, but may not when you are the player doing the raising. They may semi-bluff the tight players, but may not if they think you are likely to call. It is useful to know what they think of you and how they will play against you in specific situations. All of this takes time in studying the players to pinpoint their level of understanding.

### **Playing against a professional player**

Professional players are sharp and observant. They will observe your play and have a better idea of how you play than other players will. Normally you want to stay out of their way if you have a marginal hand. But if you are involved with a professional player, you need to think about what he thinks of you. If you have been playing tight, they may peg you as a tight player. Then you can bluff or semi-bluff with a higher degree of success. If you have made some fancy plays, such as semi-bluffing and raising for free cards, they may be more inclined to call you down. However, in the long run, it will be difficult to trick a sharp, observant player into thinking you are what you are not. You have to accept the fact that these players will have a decent handle on your game. The

money you expect to make at the table is going to come from other players.

### **Pre-Flop Tight Players may not play tight on every round**

The typical conception of players who play tight pre-Flop is they can be bluffed out of a pot in later rounds with a well-timed bluff raise or semi-bluff. Although this stereotype may be used when you do not know the players well, it shows the importance of observing and judging individual players on how they play their hands. Tight pre-Flop players who have entered a pot are entering the pot with higher quality hands than other players. If they are entering the pot with higher quality hands that means they will typically have more reason to continue on through the hand than they would if they played more starting hands. It may turn out that a pre-Flop tight player folds less often, on a percentage basis once he is already in the pot, than a looser player because the looser player often has little reason to continue with the hand after the Flop. Any player will find it tough to fold a big pocket pair, overcards to the board or inside straight draws with overcards (such as AQ when the high card on the board is a J or T). Many players, even those that are tight pre-Flop, will fall in love and get married to these premium pre-Flop hands. This can especially happen if they are selective and it is one of the few hands that they have played recently. Your observation of your opponent's play is useful as you would be able to identify this type of minute difference that others may miss.

### **Distinctions between loose players**

There are different kinds of players that could be labeled as loose players. It is useful to identify how these players are loose in order to take advantage of their weakness. Here are some of the distinctions.

1. Always loose: An overall loose player who is loose on every card.

This is the best player to play against, as he will always be chasing with unwarranted hands and often will be drawing dead (meaning that even if he hits his best card, he still will not win the hand).

The player who is always loose will see a lot of Flops, they don't mind cold calling pre-Flop raises from any position. On the Flop and afterwards, this player will continue to call with a weak hand even if the board is dangerous, such as 7♠7♥ when the Flop is A♣Q♣J♣.

2. Loose pre-Flop: A player that sees a lot of Flops, but plays decent afterwards

There are many players who are willing to cold call raises, limp in pre-Flop, and take their chances to see the Flop. Their philosophy is that they would like to see three out of the five community cards, and they do not mind paying the price to do so. Although some will continue to play loose after the Flop, there are others that are willing to fold if the Flop does not fit their hand. If you are playing against this type of loose player, you should be confident raising him pre-Flop, but you must back that up with another bet on the Flop if it is down to just the two of you. Betting on the Flop is important even if it completely misses your hand because your opponent is more likely than other loose players to fold at this point. Of course if he still calls the Flop, then the decision as to how to proceed depends on the texture of the Flop and the quality of your own hand. In short-handed games, you would like to have this player as one of your opponents because the hands are often heads-up going into the Flop, and getting him to fold on the Flop means you win the pot.

If there is another player in the hand, then the value of having this type of player in the hand is muted.

3. Loose post-Flop: A player that sees an average number of Flops, but plays loose afterwards. A player who is selective with his starting hands can play loosely on the Flop and afterwards. This player may have read some poker books with advice on tight pre-Flop strategy. The pre-Flop strategy is often the easiest to memorize as there are fewer variables. But after the pre-Flop round, there are more variables, and it becomes more difficult to memorize exact strategies. Thus a player who plays correctly pre-Flop may play too loose post-Flop because there is no chart for him to memorize.

One of the problems is not folding a decent starting hand if the Flop does not fit. Players who play loose pre-Flop will fall in love with their starting hands and get married to them throughout the rest of the hand. Hands that loose post-Flop players often play incorrectly are two high cards when the Flop does not give them a pair or any draws. They go too far with these cards in the face of strength shown by other players. These players will mumble about how a QT beat their AJ. They will complain about getting bad beats and about how unlucky they are. AJ is a better starting hand than QT, but once the Flop comes, the relative strength can easily switch. When the average player encounters the loose post-Flop player, the average player will often make the mistake of thinking that just because his foe plays tight pre-Flop it means they will continue to play tight post-Flop. This thought process could lead to some erroneous conclusions.

### **Playing against different types of loose players**

Here is an example of how you would approach a hand against different types of loose players. Let's say you open raise on the button with K♠J♠, only the big blind calls.

Flop: Q♥8♦6♣

You would prefer the opponent that plays loose pre-Flop, but correctly afterwards. That player would fold to a bet even if he held a hand like A5. Meanwhile, the opponent that is always loose may still call your bet with A5. When you miss the Flop, you prefer the opponent to fold an A. If your opponent calls, and he is loose pre-Flop, but not loose post-Flop, then you can be more confident that his call represents a drawing hand such as JT, J9, T9. You can beat these hands with K-high if neither the Turn nor the River improves either of you. You can be more confident betting again on the Turn, with intentions of checking on the River against the loose pre-Flop, but not loose post-Flop player because you are more likely to win a showdown with K-high against him than you would against the player that is loose on all rounds, because he would be willing to hang in there with an A high hand. Understanding your opponent is crucial in games where the pots become heads-up often after the Flop. In games where more players are likely to see the Flop, such as looser or low limit games, it is less useful because it would not be correct to focus only on one player. But in all games, knowing how your opponents play is always better than not knowing.

### **Thinking about what your opponent is thinking that you are thinking that he is thinking.....**

Here are the different levels of thinking, with each level built on top of another.

1. What do I have?
2. What does my opponent have?
3. What does my opponent think I have?
4. What does my opponent think I think he has?

Sometimes you don't need to go too far up in the ladder in the levels of thinking. It depends on the level your opponent is on. If your opponent only plays to the strength of his own cards, then all you have to do is go to step 2, you have to try to figure out what he has. If your opponent tries to think about your hand, then you need to think about what he thinks you have and proceed accordingly.

#### Example

You have A♦Q♣ and raise in early position. An average player calls you on the button and everyone else folds.

Your hand: A♦Q♣

Flop: A♠2♣2♦

You bet your split pair of A's with a good kicker. He calls.

Turn: 4♥

By this point, you should have already tried to figure out what your opponent has. Since he called a raise before the Flop and called the bet on the Flop, it looks likely that he has an A. But since he did not re-raise pre-Flop or raise on the Flop, you think maybe his kicker is a bit weaker than yours and he is afraid to raise into you. Also since he did not re-raise before the Flop, it would make big pocket pairs such as KK, QQ, JJ seem unlikely, since even average players will re-raise with those high quality pairs. If you bet again, he will probably call, but a check-raise could extract more from this player. A check will make it seem like you have a big pocket pair and are worried about the A on board. Your opponent will likely bet his A even with a weak kicker, and when you check-raise, he will likely call. It is often difficult for players to fold with an A in this spot even if they are confident you have the best hand. Your check has deceived your opponent into thinking that you had a worse hand than his, and probably gained you an extra bet. You were thinking about what he was thinking you have and you acted accordingly. When you checked, you can see the wheels turning in his head, adjusting his assumptions of what you have based on your action.

When you checked on the Turn, he thinks he is ahead with his split pair of A's, whereas before the Turn, he was worried about his kicker.

#### Varying your Play for Deception Purposes

Deception can be a useful tool in poker. It is nice when an opponent is playing against you thinking you have one hand when you actually have another. You are forcing your opponent to act incorrectly. An example of deception was used in the previous section where a check on the Turn convinced your opponent to think he had the better hand than you had. Bad players make these mistakes without another player deceiving them. They deceive themselves and will often call you down when they are very unlikely to have the best hand. Against good players who can play more correctly, you will want to vary your play now and then. Play the same hand differently in the same situations if you can do so without giving up much edge. This will make your opponent think twice on future hands. The benefit may not only be on the hand in question, but could extend out to future hands.



Here is a situation:

You are in the big blind and you hold ATs. Everyone folds to the button who is a good player. He raises and the small blind folds. In a situation like this, re-raising or calling is fairly close in value. It is nice to mix up your play by sometimes re-raising and sometimes calling so your opponent will not have a good handle on what you have when you are re-raising him.

Continuing on with the hand, let's say you simply called his pre-Flop raise.

Your hand: ATs

Flop: A-Q-3 rainbow

You check and he bets. A check-raise may scare off your opponent if he does not have an A, but since you want to also sometimes check-raise when you have KJ and JT (for just a gut shot straight draw), you also need to check-raise sometimes when you do flop an A. When you are check-raising without the A in future hands, your opponent may assume you do have an A and fold if he does not have one himself. If you play a hand like this the same way every time, it will allow the more astute players to put you on a hand too easily. For example, if you always check-raise when you have an A in this spot, but never when you have a straight draw, then your opponent knows he can fold a hand like QJ. On the other hand, if you never check-raise when you have a weak A, but always check-raise with the inside straight draw, then your opponent can feel comfortable calling you down with the same QJ hand. Mixing up your play will put him on the defensive, and he will not be sure exactly what you have. Scenarios like this come up more often in short-handed games than they do in full games.

When you vary your game, your play may look dumb once in a while. In the above scenario with a flop of A-Q-3, if you had check-raised with KJ and lost the hand while being forced to show it down on the River, it may look like you were gambling it up and taking unnecessary risk. Some observers may even think you are on tilt or playing poorly, and not give you the rightful respect you deserve as a poker player. When this happens, it is best to try to use this to your advantage. Now you should play a bit tighter and semi-bluff less in future hands because the observant opponents are going to be more likely to call given your previous play.

With all that said, it would be wrong to vary your play too much if it means you are giving up too much expectancy on the current hand compared to the possible expectancy you may receive on future hands. Some players will take this idea too far and play wild and crazy just to establish an image of a maniac. They will surely increase their expectancy on future hands when they do get back to playing correctly. However, they may be losing too much on the current hand in order to establish that wild image. A good way to vary your play is to change up in situations where there really is not too much difference how you play. This way you are not losing much edge and yet gain the benefit of making it tough for your opponents to read your hand correctly.

### **Playing against the same players all the time**

If you play against the same players all the time, you should have a good grasp of how they play the game even before you sit down at the table. This is a nice advantage to have, but the other players should also have a better idea of your play as well. However, a good player should be able to take advantage of familiarity more than a poor player. A good player will be able to pick up on

tendencies of the other players and have fewer tendencies himself. These tendencies include, betting patterns, check-raising patterns and re-raising patterns. If you always play in games where you don't know any of the players, then it is more difficult to play. You will play differently against different type of players, but if you don't know what type of player your opponents are, you will not be able to play accordingly. There is further discussion about this issue in the Extra Topics chapter.

### **Playing against unknown players**

It is difficult to play against unknown players. It is unclear how they play and you are forced to size them up quickly so you can make decisions when you are in a hand against them. Sometimes your quickly formed opinion of the player will be wrong, and you will make an incorrect playing decision based on that wrong opinion. But the more you play against an opponent, the more you will get a feel for how they play.

Here are some key questions to answer against unknown players

#### **1. How observant are they?**

Watch where their eyes are looking. If they are watching every player's movement like a hawk, they are more likely to be sharp than if their eyes glazes over in between hands.

#### **2. Are they thinking?**

Sometimes it is easy to tell if someone is thinking or not. Players who think are usually the sharper players. Players who look like all their actions are automatic are probably not thinking as much. Of course, the better players have learned to act quickly and not appear to be thinking, so it is sometimes difficult to tell who is thinking and who is not.

#### **3. How old are they? Are they male or female?**

As a generality, younger players tend to be more aggressive than older players. Men are more aggressive than women at the poker table. Without knowing anything else about them, use these stereotypes as an initial base in sizing up the player.

#### **4. How many hands are they playing?**

After a few hands, you will notice how many hands each player has played. For example, after five hands, if player X has limped in and saw each Flop, then he is probably a loose player. If Player Y has folded every single hand, he may be a tight player. If not, at least he is not loose. If Player Z has raised in three of the five hands and won all the ones that he entered the pot with strong starting hands, then that information is not useful. That is because many players would play the same way, whether they are good or bad players. If he was a bad player and got lucky getting dealt big pocket pairs in three out of the first five hands, then the play of those hands are automatic. You do not want to confuse winning three out of five pots with being a good player.

### **When will a player play tighter than usual?**

There are occasions when a loose player may play tighter than normal. This can happen when the player has just rallied back from a significant loss to the point where he is close to even or slightly ahead. This player will now be more cognizant of that breakeven point and will be more risk-adverse than normal. He does not want to get back in the red since he had to battle so hard to get out of it. Another time this can happen is when a player has a decent win and is close to leaving.

You can see this when he starts to rack up his chips and looks like he is waiting until the big blind gets to him before he leaves. Since he had a nice win, he does not want to leave and give some of his winnings back, at the same time, he does not want to give up on the positive expectancy of getting “free” hands when not in the blinds. Another time is when the player is talking to a friend who is not playing at the table but is just “visiting”. In that case, the player will usually try not to embarrass himself with poor play, and will play as solidly as he knows how.

### **When will a player play looser or more aggressive than usual?**

A player who has few chips left may play more aggressive and looser as he looks to get even. His thought process may be that he has lost so much, any extra loss does not make a difference. For most people, the difference between losing \$2,100 and losing \$2,300 is smaller than the difference between losing \$100 and losing \$300 even though the difference is \$200 in both cases. The value of money has changed for the losing player. His current loss has clouded his judgement about the value of money. The losing player will not mind throwing in the extra chips when he has this mentality. Watch for it, and adjust accordingly. Make value bets and call down this player when he is losing big relative to the times when he is not.

### **Examples of adjusting your play based on the opponent**

Knowing your opponent’s style is most useful in situations when there are fewer players. Here are some examples when you will play the same hand differently depending on your opponent when it is heads-up on the River.

#### **Example 1**

You have AK. You open raise pre-Flop on the button and the big blind calls. You have been betting all along and getting called. By the River, the board is T-4-2-7-7 with no flush possibilities. It is checked to you on the River. Should you check or bet?

Your hand: AK

Board: T-4-2-7-7

If your opponent is a calling station, you should consider betting. Although he will call with any pair, he may also call with a worse A-high hand, such as AJ, A8, A3. Against a calling station, you do not mind betting since you will get called down by a worse hand. However, if your opponent will fold then you should just check. This can occur if he was on a draw with a hand like A3 (gutshot straight draw with one high card) and called on the Flop and Turn. You should not bet against this player because he you cannot count on him calling without a pair. If he will not call unless he has a pair, then you cannot gain any value by betting. Knowing how the players play is crucial in deciding whether to bet or check.

#### **Example 2**

You have QJ in the big blind. An aggressive player has raised in middle position. You call along with a couple of other players.

Your hand: QJo

Flop: K-T-9 rainbow

You flopped a straight and there are no flush draws, you are happy! You decide to play your hand strong on the Flop with a check-raise because you think there is a good chance you will get paid off since there are some high cards on the board.

Turn: 3

The Turn cannot improve another player's hand over yours, and you bet. Your lone opponent, the middle position player who raised pre-Flop calls.

River: A

Now you should consider check-raising. Your opponent is an aggressive player, a check by you in this spot may make him think you are afraid of the A. This means you may have a hand like KQ or KJ. An aggressive player will bet if he has an A in this spot with a hand like AQ or AJ (he would have been on a straight draw, and may have been thinking an A was an out for him as well). Even if he had a worse hand, such as QQ or JJ, he may consider betting in the hopes that you fold a split pair of K's. Calling stations do not press their edge like the aggressive players do. So a check-raise against a calling station will work less often because he will often check even if he has an A. The calling station fears you may have a better hand and will check even though he has improved. Against calling stations and passive players, betting out on the River is the best option.

### **Game Selection**

The first level of your game selection decision is the limit. If you want to play \$20-\$40 or higher, but the best game is a \$3-\$6 game, then that does not help. But if there is an especially juicy \$10-\$20 game, then you may need to consider that game. If a \$10-\$20 game is filled with many bad players, then it may be more profitable than a \$20-\$40 game filled with decent players.

Once you have the limit in mind, you should choose depending on the quality of the players. The best games are the ones with many predictable and loose players. The worst games are the ones with many unpredictable, aggressive and sharp players. If there are multiple tables at the same limit, and you have a choice of which table to be seated in, then you want to first scour the players at the tables. See if you know any of the players and try to choose the one that looks the softest. Sometimes you may want to choose the table where the sharpest player is sitting at. Sharp players may have been going through the same game selection decision and chose the table they are sitting at because they thought it was the softest table. If that was the case, then that table would still be the better table even if it had the best player there.

If the casino does not offer you a choice, then this is moot. Many casinos will have more than one table at the same limit with one game as the main game and the other games as the must-move games. The idea of the must-move games is to make sure the main game does not break up and there is at least one game going. When the casino has this rule, players cannot freely move from one table to another.

The only time you may want to choose a tougher game (if there are two or more games at the same limit) is if you want to go through the experience of playing against a tougher lineup. This may help you prepare when you move up in limits. For example, if you usually play \$10-\$20 and are

thinking of moving up to the \$20-\$40 game, you may want to choose the toughest \$10-\$20 game possible in preparation for the \$20-\$40 game.

### **Where should you sit?**

When making a decision as to where to sit, the key is not so much how well or poorly the other players play. Instead, the key is the other player's style and level of aggressiveness. In general, you want the unpredictable and aggressive players to your right. This way they will have to act most of the time before you do. Even though they are unpredictable, you will be able to see their action before you have to act, thus reducing some of the ambiguity in their game. With the predictable and tight players, you do not mind having them to your left, acting after you act. Even though they will see how you act and have positional advantage over you most of the time, it is not something to be overly concerned with. The predictable and tight players will not be playing against you nearly as often as the unpredictable and aggressive players. So their positional advantage (when they are sitting to your left) over you should occur at less often than your positional advantage (when they are sitting to your right) over the unpredictable players who are playing more hands.

If a predictable player raises you after you have bet, your decision is easier when you have a relatively marginal hand compared to the times when an unpredictable player raises you. When a predictable player raises, you will usually have a good idea what he has, because he is predictable.

On the other hand, a raise by an unpredictable player can mean a wider variety of things. He could have the nuts or he could be on semi-bluffing or bluffing. He could be raising for a free card or he could have top pair. It is much more difficult to pinpoint an unpredictable player on a hand, so you would prefer to have him act before you have to act. In other words, the information that an unpredictable player gives you by acting is much more valuable than the information that a predictable player gives you by acting.